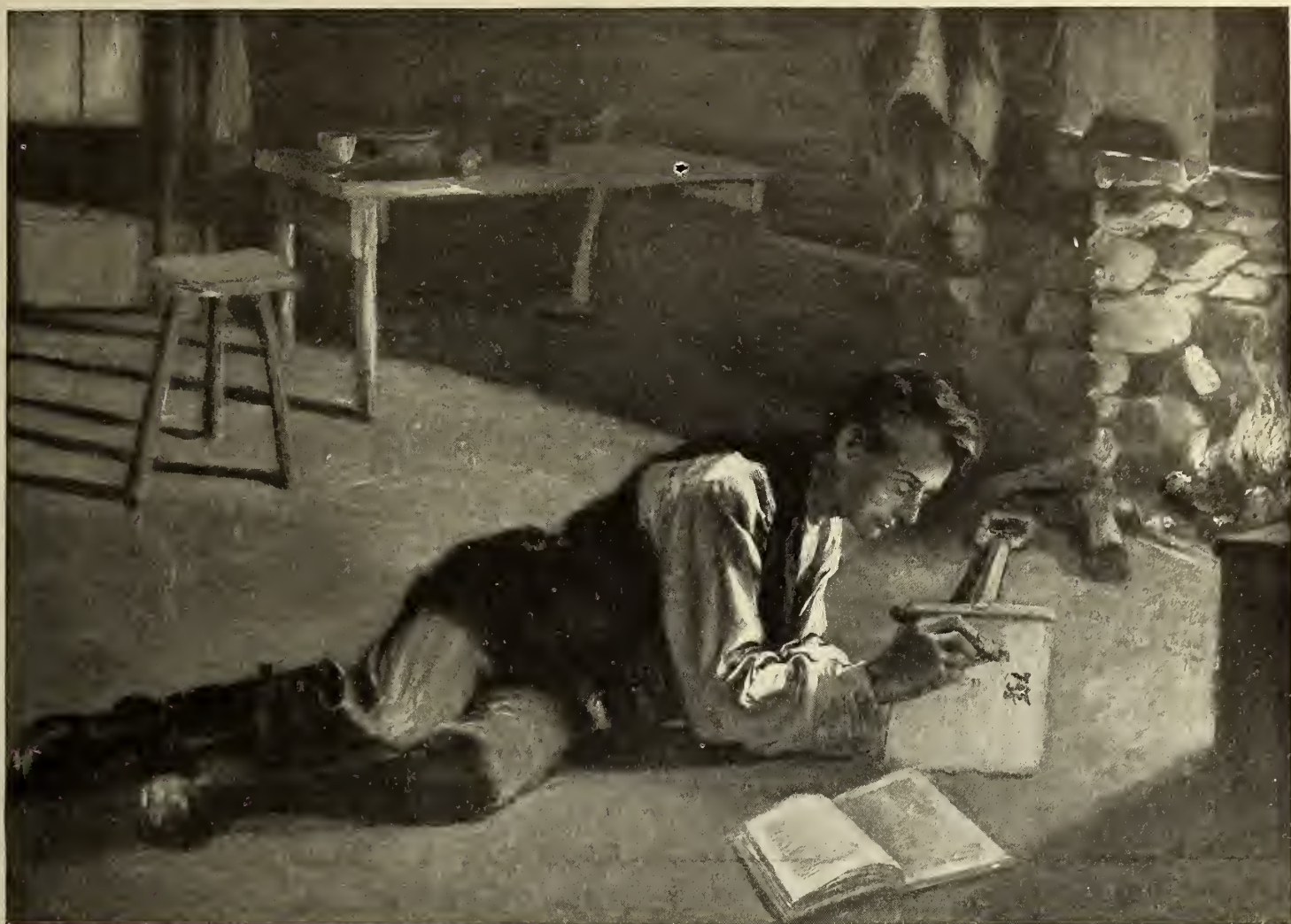


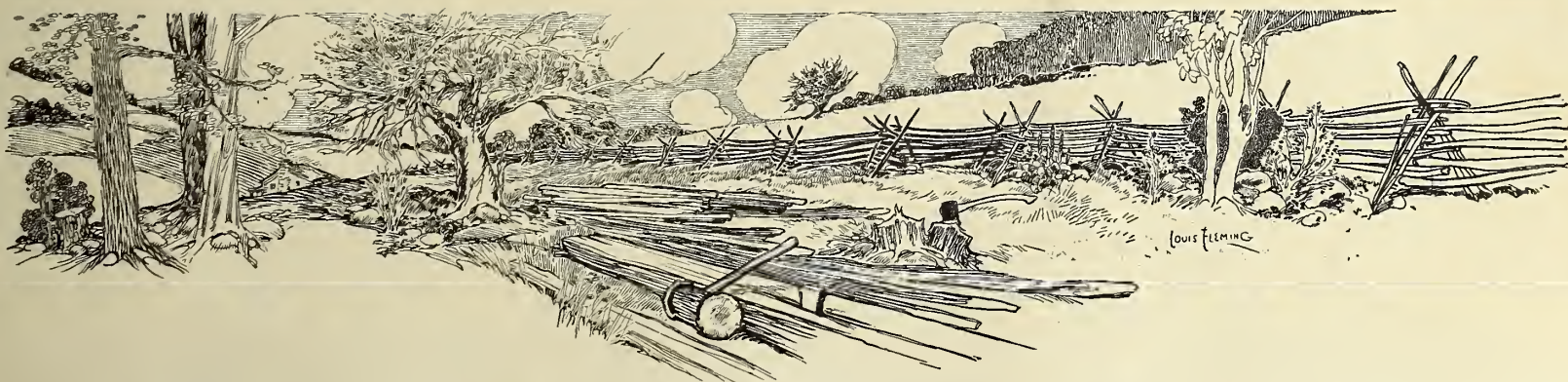
"HAD LINCOLN GONE TO COLLEGE,"—

A Symposium by Alexander K. McClure, William T. Harris, E. Benjamin Andrews, Charles F. Thwing, Henry Mitchell MacCracken, Henry Clews, and William O. Stoddard



I'll study and get ready, and then, maybe, the chance will come.—Abraham Lincoln

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His Career Was a Climax of Ceaseless Self-Culture

ALEXANDER K. MCCLURE

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WOULD a collegiate education have made a greater Lincoln? It is safe to assume that ninety-nine hundredths of the men who have achieved distinction have been aided by a collegiate education in their youth, or have been in some measure hindered in their advancement by the want of it. It is justly accepted, as a correct principle in fitting young men for usefulness in life, that a liberal education is one of the most essential advantages that can be given, but the rule is not without its exceptions.

I am quite sure that Horace Greeley would never have been the accomplished and incisive paragrapher that he was, if his early life had been spent in schools and colleges instead of starting at the lowest round of the ladder as a printer's apprentice, and working his way up under discouragements that at times must have been disheartening. He stands alone as the greatest paragrapher produced by American journalism, and his leaders for his great newspaper are among the ablest and freshest which came from the editors of his day. He was always a great student of books, but he never ceased to be a greater student of men, and that is what gave him his advantage over a collegiate editor. His everyday-life study always dominated the education that he had acquired by close application for many years. John W. Forney, who was probably second only to Greeley as a paragrapher, had just the same education. His training, that fitted him to be one of the great editors of the country, began as a printer's devil.

They both learned, at an early day, the important lesson that the greatest study of mankind is man.

Abraham Lincoln was born close to Mother Earth, and his associations were almost wholly with the struggling lowly until he reached full manhood. He was also a great student of books, and borrowed the few that could be found within miles of his humble home. His life was one desperate struggle for bread and raiment, and he was in constant intercourse with those who, like himself, were learning the lesson that "hardness ever of hardness is mother." It is only natural that a young man with such an environment should have all his sympathies enlisted for those who suffered as he did, and it was fortunate for him that, in his study of mankind, especially of his own class, he early acquired a settled conviction that the safety of the nation lies in the patriotism and integrity of the masses of the people.

I once heard him rebuke a western congressman who was new in Washington, and who felt that, in making some request of the President, he had to apologize for the want of intelligence of his far-away constituency, by saying: "I have always felt that God must love common people, or He would n't have made so many of them." I have seen him confronted by the struggles of faction and the jealousies of statesmanship to a degree that would have made almost any other man despair of the Republic, but in shaping the policy of the government to meet civil war, and again in determining upon his emancipation policy, he was entirely indifferent to the wrangles of the great men about him, and sought solely to ascertain the considerate judgment of the American people. When convinced on that point his course was settled, and no human power could change his purpose.

His convictions flowered in decision, and fruited in action.

There was no material change in Mr. Lincoln's chief studies after he had reached the bar and created a new and entirely changed environment for himself. He was less a reader in later life than he was in his boyhood. One of his biographers, who understood him better than all others, said that Lincoln "read less and thought more than any other public man of my acquaintance." When he was a rising man in his early days at the bar he was seldom found in the cloister. The village store room, or the village hotel, where he spent many of his evenings in free conversation with the commonalty, was the school in which he was more thoroughly educated than any other of our great public men.

He was fond of a typical western story, and was most apt in repeating it. It was the one safety valve to Lincoln in the sorest trials of the war, when almost any other man of his keen sympathy for the sufferings of the country would have fallen in the race. I have seen him, after discussing in the soberest strain the sorrows and perils of the country, when he would speak with almost superhuman grandeur, and appalling sadness would settle upon his brow, suddenly seem to forget it all, and his face would brighten like the sun just emerging from a cloud, as he would tell a story and seem to enjoy it as thoroughly as he did when entirely free from care in riding his western circuit.

Lincoln's education was thus almost wholly made up of the study of the people. He loved them, he was in thorough sympathy with them, and he felt that they needed only to reach a fair understanding of any vital issue to enable them to decide it with absolute fidelity to their own free institutions. The effect of the habits of his early life was never effaced from his character, even when oppressed with the consuming cares of civil war; and, when he had labored and suffered through a whole day and even to midnight, there was nothing else that he loved so much as to spend all the time he could afford to give to his western associates who knew him well, or to those who had become intimately acquainted with his habits and tastes.

His school education was extremely limited, but he possessed extraordinary natural ability, and learned something every waking hour of his life. On more than one occasion he plainly exhibited his contempt for those about him who obviously claimed superiority because of superior education, and he proved in every instance that he was a foeman more than worthy of the steel of those who belittled him because of his presumed ignorance of a college curriculum. During all the many exhibitions of his extraordinary ability, while president of the United States, he never departed from the methods which his peculiar education had taught him. He thus stands in the history of our great Americans as the one whose education was one continuous study of mankind from his early boyhood until his tragic death.

There are not in any of the productions of our great statesmen more exquisite and impressive exhibitions of rhetoric than are found in very many of Lincoln's state papers and letters while president, but a student who carefully analyzes them will find that in every instance they are the offspring of the profound sympathy of a great student of the people. In his second inaugural address, delivered when the military power of the Confederacy was confessedly broken, and when he might have been excused for indulging in some expressions of triumph, he uttered the beautiful sentence that is now quoted in every civilized land: "With malice toward none, with charity for all," and his sympathy for the southern people, whom he regarded as the victims of their great leaders, was quite as sincere as his sympathy for the men of the North who bravely wore the blue. He had learned the law of kindness by his keen appreciation of the few kind offices shown him when in poverty and want, and it remained as one of the jewels of his character until the assassin struck him down. His sole study was the great school of the world, whose doors are ever open.

I have long believed, after an intimate personal acquaintance with Mr. Lincoln, that he would have fallen short in many of the best attributes of his greatness if he had enjoyed good educational advantages in his boyhood and had become a graduate of a college. His studies would have absorbed him and entirely changed the trend of his life. He would have been great under any circumstances; he would have been more polished, and more scholarly, but he would have lost much of the most important attribute he possessed,—his thorough knowledge of the sovereign people whose government and laws he was called upon to administer.

I know of no better distinctive illustration of the two sources of education than is given in the lives and public careers of Abraham Lincoln and Edward Everett. Everett was born to the best educational advantages, was graduated from college with high honors, and studiously increased his scholastic attainments during his whole life. Had he been born in a hovel, as Lincoln was, and destined to struggle desperately for bread from boyhood to manhood, without educational advantages, and a stranger to college halls, would he have attained distinction? On the other hand, had Abraham Lincoln been born to comfort or affluence as Everett was, with the best educational advantages in school, academy, and college, would Lincoln have been the Abraham Lincoln of the people?

Soon after the decisive battle of the war, at Gettysburg, the corner stone of a monument to our brave soldiers who gave their lives on that bloody field for the preservation of the Union was laid with imposing ceremonies. It was one of the great popular demonstrations of the war, and the occasion called for the first of American orators to tell the story of the heroism and sacrifice of our people to maintain their government, and Edward Everett was logically chosen as the man best fitted for the task. He came in the grandeur of his vigor, eminently skilled in scholarship, in oratory, and in all the manly graces, and his address is beautiful, pure in diction, and elegant in rhetoric, but who remembers it? On the same occasion President Lincoln delivered a brief address, occupying not over ten minutes, that he had that morning written on a few scraps of paper.



He was a stranger to scholarship, and destitute of the graces which add so much charm to personality, but he was listened to with breathless silence, and there is not a schoolboy or girl in the country to-day who does not know of that great deliverance, and there is not a worshiper at the altar of liberty in any clime who does not quote it. In the beautiful concluding sentence of that address Lincoln sums up the education of his life and the one study that he had ever cherished, when he told that the men who had there given their lives had made the sacrifice so that "government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

College Life Would Have Made Him less Melancholy

E. BENJAMIN ANDREWS
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I AM unwilling to admit that a liberal education can be or could have been deleterious or superfluous in the career of any man. In Lincoln's case it is harder than usual to show positively that such an education would have been advantageous, because both in character and in achievements he was not only the peer of the best rulers who have lived, but also nearly all that could be expected or desired of any man situated as he was.

The qualities usually lacking in uneducated or self-educated men, such as logic, method, and ability to master quickly new situations and problems, could hardly be said to characterize Abraham Lincoln. Even the culture proceeding from large and good reading he had managed to acquire, at least in its general features. He was not narrow or opinionated, but wide-minded and full of sympathy.

If one were to admit that Lincoln would not have been benefited by a more complete and regular education, the admission would not constitute an argument against the importance of higher education. Had Mr. Lincoln been president during any other crisis of our national history, the relative slenderness of his mental outfit would certainly have been unpleasantly apparent, much hindering his success. Acquaintance with history, international law, and deep statecraft at large,—a species of knowledge of which

Mr. Lincoln had comparatively little, but which so adorns and assists the present president of the United States, are almost always necessary to true success in the presidency; but the lack of them did not greatly weigh against Mr. Lincoln in his peculiar time. The problems confronting him when elected—I mean, of course, the general ones, such as slavery, its status in the constitution, and the rights of the states,—were preëminently domestic, and had been threshed over during his earlier lifetime until the principles of them were familiar to all. He had only to bring to bear upon these questions that marvelous good sense which was native to him, in order to make his way triumphant.

It is sometimes said that education tends to deprive a man possessing great native ability, like Abraham Lincoln or Horace Greeley, of simplicity, straightforwardness, implicit trust in oneself, discretion, and adroitness, and to render him pedantic and artificial. I can not admit this. At least, in the evolution of Abraham Lincoln no such ill results would have appeared. He was one of those men whom no amount of information, nor any influence of schooling or association with others, can change in any essential characteristic.

Even situated as he was, having tasks in hand with which in a general way his whole life had rendered him familiar, President Lincoln would, in at least three particulars, have been better off had his educational training been more ample.

He would have been less a boor,—less given to vulgar and indecorous ways. It is no longer a secret, I suppose, that, on account of such things, the War President was a constant source of anxiety to his family and to all those near him. Naturally, little was said about this while he lived or immediately after his death, but enough of it is now known to make one wish that the life, perfect as it was, could have been, in this not unimportant detail, more so.

Education would also have given Mr. Lincoln greater confidence in himself. With it he would have been less under the necessity of feeling his way, of taking counsel with one and another, and less fearful, after having acted, that he had not acted well. His difficulty in this respect weighs upon all undereducated men who are truly great.

Still again, had Mr. Lincoln been better educated, he would have been less given to melancholy, and would have enjoyed his mind and himself better, with a greater power of healthful, mental diversion, and more abundant and more worthy food for reflection. Thus, quite possibly, he might have achieved things in which he failed, and might have brought to pass more easily some of the things which he accomplished.

His Directive Intellect Utilized the Learning of Others

WILLIAM T. HARRIS
[United States Commissioner of Education]

WHAT would have been the career of Abraham Lincoln had he received a full college and professional education? There are difficulties in the way of an answer. It happens quite often that men of small school education prove themselves to have great directive power when they find themselves placed in the management of large wealth or in responsible public positions. But it is always found, in such cases, that these men show

their power in selecting for their lieutenants or subordinate commanders persons of higher education for those functions which require it. For instance, an illiterate commander—say a king, for example,—may have a gift for strategy, but he secures educated engineers to make his bridges, lay his pontoons, build his fortresses, write his

It is an old and true maxim that "a drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall." So it is with men. If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend. Therein is a drop of honey that catches his heart, which, say what he will, is the great highroad to his reason, and, when once it is gained, you will find but little trouble in convincing his judgment of the justice of your cause, if, indeed, that cause really be a just one.—LINCOLN